

Message Text

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TAGS: PINT, PO

SUBJ: IMPORTANT EDITOR IS FIRED: THE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

SUMMARY: ARTUR PORTELA FILHE, THE OUTSPOKEN EDITOR OF LISBON'S
DAILY "JORNAL NOVE," HAS BEEN FIRED BY THE NEWSPAPER'S OWNERS
ON THE ALLEGED GROUNDS THAT HE WAS LEADING THE PAPER TO SUPPORT

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A SOCIALIST LINE THAT WAS TOO MONOLITHIC AND NOT "PLURALISTIC"

ENOUGH IN AN OVERALL ANTI-COMMUNIST VEIN. IN THE CONTEXT OF TOO MANY NEWSPAPERS BEING PUBLISHED AND OF LEFTIST SENSITIVITIES TO REAL AND IMAGINED GOP PRESSURES TO CREATE A CENTER-ORIENTED PRESS, THIS DISMISSAL OF SUCH A WELL-KNOWN AND STRONG EDITOR WILL RAISE CONSIDERABLE CONTROVERSY. END SUMMARY.

1. THE FIRING AND WHY: THE THREE-MAN ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL OF "JORNAL NOVO," WHO REPRESENT THE BUSINESS-ORIENTED AND ESSENTIALLY CENTER-RIGHT OWNERSHIP OF THE AFTERNOON TABLOID, ON FEB. 2 ANNOUNCED THE DISMISSAL OF PORTELA, WHO WAS EDITOR OF THE PAPER SINCE ITS FOUNDING IN APRIL 1975. THEY TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED PUBLICATION OF THE PAPER AS WELL THE OWNERS ACCUSED PORTELA OF IGNORING THE PAPER'S EDITORIAL STATUTES AS HE LED "JORNAL NOVO" TOWARD A "MORE MONOLITHIC SOCIALIST" LINE INSTEAD OF A "PLURALISTIC PATHWAY TO SOCIALISM." THEY ALSO ASSERTED THAT PORTELA'S EDITORIAL LINE HAD BEEN A FACTOR IN A RECENT DECLINE IN THE PAPER'S CIRCULATION -- FROM A HIGH DURING THE VASCO GONCALVES GOVERNMENTS OF 115,000 TO A LOW OF AROUND 55,000 IN RECENT WEEKS.

2. SOME BACKGROUND: "JORNAL NOVO" SINCE ITS FOUNDING BORE THE STRONG IMPRINT OF PORTELA'S TOUCH. HE WROTE A DAILY FRONT-PAGE SIGNED EDITORIAL WHICH, ALONG WITH A DAILY PHOTO-MONTAGE WHICH POKED FUN AT POLITICAL FIGURES OF ALL PERSUASIONS, WAS THE NEWSPAPER'S BEST SELLING POINT. THE PAPER THUS STRONGLY REFLECTED PORTELA'S PERSONALITY AND POLITICAL IDEAS. THESE IDEAS WERE BASED UPON A LEFTIST BUT INDEPENDENT SOCIALISM WHICH WAS NOT ALWAYS ALIGNED WITH THE POLICIES OF THE AZEVEDO GOVERNMENT. THEY CONTAINED A SUSTAINED THRUST WHICH AT TIMES ATTACKED THE PROGRAMS OF THE CENTER-RIGHT PARTIES, THE PPD AND THE CDS. PPD LEADERS HAVE BEEN SO IRRITATED AT PORTELA'S EMPHASIS ON THE PARTY'S SPLIT THAT THE PPD NEWSPAPER OF JAN. 28 RAN A FULL PAGE SATIRICAL ATTACK ON PORTELA. A CLOSE ASSOCIATE OF ONE OF "JORNAL NOVO'S" ADMINISTRATORS INFORMED US AS EARLY AS

MID-OCTOBER 1975 THAT THE PAPER'S OWNERS WERE UNHAPPY WITH PORTELA AND WERE CONSIDERING HIS DISMISSAL. SINCE NOV 25 PORTELA FREQUENTLY EXPRESSES CONCERN THAT ALL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES WERE MOVING TOO FAR TO THE RIGHT. HE GAVE HEAVY PLAY TO VIEWS OF INDEPENDENT LEFT EX-MES LINE. SINCE THE OWNERS' LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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POLITICAL LINE IS CENTER-RIGHT, AND PORTELA IS NOT ON THAT WAVE-LENGTH, THE FIRING WAS NOT UNPREDICTABLE.

3. THE CONTEXT: THE FIRING OF PORTELA AND THE SUSPENSION OF PUBLICATION OF THE PAPER (A NEW INTERIM EDITOR HAS BEEN NAMED) COME AT A TIME WHEN ADMINISTRATORS APPOINTED TO RUN THE EIGHT STATE-OWNED DAILY NEWSPAPERS ARE CONSOLIDATING THEIR CONTROL OF EDITORS AND NEWSROOMS. THE TREND IN

NEARLY ALL OF THESE NEWSPAPERS IS TOWARD "POLITICAL PLURALISM," MORE BALANCED REPORTING, AND CONSEQUENTLY A STANCE WHICH ELIMINATES THE PRO-LEFT EDITORIALIZING SO COMMON IN STATE-OWNED PAPERS' NEW REPORTING UNTIL NOV. 25. ONLY LAST WEEK STATE-APPOINTED ADMINISTRATORS OF AFTERNOON "A CJRECAL," NAMED A NEW EDITOR IN A MOVE ONE OF THEM DESCRIBED TO US AS DIRECTLY RELATED TO "GIVING THE PORTUGUESE PUBLIC WHAT IT WANTS, A NEWSPAPER WITH A MORE CENTER-RIGHT POLITICAL ORIENTATION."

4. THE CENTER-RIGHT TREND IN NEWSPAPERS IS CREATING CIRCULATION PROBLEMS FOR SOME OF THE INDEPENDENT LISBON PRESS, WHICH CAME ABOUT IN THE PAST TWO YEARS IN LARGE MEASURE TO COMBAT THE PRE-NOV. 25 PRO-COMMUNIST NATURE OF MOST OF THE STATE-OWNED PRESS. THE COMMUNISTS IN JANUARY STARTED PUBLISHING A NEW DAILY MORNING PAPER, "O DIARIO," AS AN OUTLET FOR THEIR VIEWPOINTS WHICH THEY FORMERLY SO EFFECTIVELY PLACED IN THE STATE-OWNED PAPERS. MEANWHILE, THE INDEPENDENT PAPERS -- DEPRIVED OF THEIR MONOPOLY ON BALANCED REPORTING AND ANTI-COMMUNIST STANCE -- WERE SUBJECT TO NEW CIRCULATION PRESSURES. "JORNAL NOVO" ALSO LOST GROUND TO THE SOCIALIST "A LUTA," WHICH IS A MORE BALANCED, MORE COMPLETE NEWSPAPER.

5. COMMENT: PORTELA FILHO WILL CLAIM -- -AND SOME OF THE LEFT-WING PRESS WILL CHIME IN, WITH PLEASURE -- THAT HIS FIRING REPRESENTS A SINISTER SERIES OF ATTEMPTS WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE GOVERNMENT TO MAKE THE MEDIA MORE CENTER-ORIENTED AND "ALL ALIKE." PORTELA PJ SEEKING TO PRESENT HIS CASE TO THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL. THE "JORNAL NOVO" MANAGEMENT APPEARS TO BE WITHIN ITS LEGAL RIGHTS IN FIRING PORTELA, ALTHOUGH ITS MOVE MIGHT BE REGARDED AS CALLOUS IN VIEW OF PORTELA'S SINGULAR COURAGE IN ATTACKING THE VASCO GONCALVES GOVERNMENTS LAST YEAR AT A TIME WHEN ALMOST NO OTHER EDITOR HAD THE GALL AND WHEREWITHAL TO DO SO. BUT PORTELA'S FIRING PROBABLY IS BEST SEEN IN THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CONTEXT OF AN OVER-POPULATED NEWSPAPER FIELD, WHERE THERE WILL BE STRESSES AND STRAINS AS THE PUBLIC SETTLES INTO NEW READERSHIP PATTERNS -- AND SOME PAPERS, BOTH INDEPENDENT AND STATE-OWNED, WILL BE ELIMINATED. THE COMMUNICATIONS MINISTER LAST WEEK TOLD US THAT HE STILL PLANS TO CEASE PUBLICATION OF TWO STATE-OWNED DAILY PAPERS, BEFORE ELECTIONS. PORTELA, AS A STRONG PERSONALITY AND FORCEFUL WRITER, WILL DOUBTLESS FIND A NEW OUTLET.
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